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Viewing cable 07LIMA487, PERU: GOVERNMENT PLAN TO TAKE BACK ITS TERRITORY

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07LIMA487	2007-02-20 22:45	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Lima

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SUBJECT: PERU: GOVERNMENT PLAN TO TAKE BACK ITS TERRITORY

Classified By: Ambassador J. Curtis Struble for reasons 1.4(c) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: The Garcia government has developed a comprehensive plan that, successfully implemented, could end the continuing threat to Peru's peace and security represented by Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso -- SL) remnants while blunting the FARC and narcotraffickers. The four-part plan focuses on regions where a weak state presence has allowed terrorist or narcotics groups to flourish, potentially threatening national security. They are the VRAE, the Huallaga valley (areas where separate SL columns operate), the Putumayo (to control the border with Colombia and blunt FARC influence) as well as Peru's northern coast (targeting maritime narcotraffickers). Substantively, the plan incorporates enhanced intelligence collection, targeted security operations, infusions of economic support that establish the state's presence and civic actions intended to separate terrorist groups from local populations. Besides addressing the vexing lack of a unified command authority in the VRAE and Huallaga regions, the plan enjoys political support at the highest levels and appears to have sufficient funding for at least the first part -- Plan VRAE -- to begin in earnest. In its scope and thoroughness, this comprehensive CT/CN plan appears to offer more promise than anything evidenced by the previous government, but the real proof will be in its implementation. End Summary.

¶2. (S/NF) The Garcia government, led by the Ministries of Defense and Interior, has developed a comprehensive counter-terrorism plan that could end the continuing menace to Peru's peace and security represented by the Shining Path (SL) while also blunting FARC and narcotrafficker influence. According to sensitive reporting, SL has 200-500 armed militants that operate independently in two separate regions, one in the VRAE and the other in the Huallaga valley. While these SL columns still espouse the group's revolutionary "Maoist" ideology, reporting in recent years records their transformation into mercenaries who sell protection and extortion services to narcotics traffickers and other criminal operations, much like the FARC in Colombia. While SL remnants are relatively few and geographically isolated, government intelligence officials believe that, like the FARC, the terrorist group could reemerge as a significant national security threat in the future.

¶3. (S) The government's plan is multidimensional first in geographic terms, focusing on four priority areas. Indeed, one might characterize the plan as, in effect, four separate plans arranged into one loose framework.

-- The first two plans target the VRAE and the Huallaga Valley -- remote coca growing zones east of the Andes that cut across the departments of Junin, Huancevelica, Ayacucho and Apurimac. Not coincidentally, these areas are also home to the two separate remnant columns of SL, who operate independently of one another. "Plan VRAE" is already approved and closest to execution.

-- The third plan seeks to reinforce security in the Putumayo region along the northern border with Colombia. It aims to expand the state's presence in that remote region, including with patrols along the Putumayo river in order to prevent FARC elements from using Peruvian territory. (The FARC uses Peruvian territory, to some extent, for rest and relaxation, logistics and supply and has co-opted some communities and local leaders in the region.)

-- The fourth plan, still in gestation, aims for government security forces to more closely monitor and control the country's northern coast. In recent years some of Peru's largest drug seizures were made along or offshore the northern coast, indicating its growing importance as a trafficking route.

While each of these targeted areas requires a distinct plan crafted to its particular geographic and other challenges,

they are all similar in their remoteness, lack of state presence, and the ability of illegal armed groups, including terrorists, to conduct operations there.

14. (S) Substantively, the government's plan incorporates the interconnected, mutually reinforcing elements of classic counterinsurgency strategy. These elements are:

- Enhanced intelligence gathering capabilities to identify with greater precision the physical location and membership of these groups. (Government officials have requested specific assistance from U.S. counterparts in this connection.)

- Targeted security operations, which aim to root out the terrorists while minimizing damage to innocent members of surrounding communities. Past governments erred in not extirpating definitively the remnants of SL while they were weak. The stepped-up pace of SL attacks in the two regions over the past 18 months shows that the remnant groups used the respite to recruit auxiliaries, enlist locals in intelligence collection, and build symbiotic relations with narcotics traffickers and illegal loggers. The current plan could finally remove this threat. At the same time, the plan reflects an understanding, learned through past missteps, that security operations alone are insufficient to the task.

- Establishing and expanding the state's presence with infusions of economic support to build roads, schools, clinics and to pay for other pressing local needs. The government recognizes that terrorist groups have survived in the vacuum left by the absence of the state, and that failing to correct this situation would inevitably doom the larger effort.

- Civic operations to win the "hearts and minds" of local populations and to convince them that their future lies with the government rather than with the terrorists. This will take the form of a more integrated "community policing" concept in which relationships between security forces and local populations are cemented by long-term intensive contact and by high-impact public relations outreach such as health and vaccination campaigns. (One persistent structural problem in the past has been that, while security forces rotate in and out of these remote regions, terrorist groups remain, and therefore have a more intimate knowledge of the people and terrain.)

The economic support and civic operations components seek to "separate" local populations from terrorist groups, build trust between local populations and security forces and provide the vital human intelligence needed to carry out other elements of the plan.

15. (S/NF) The government's plan seeks to overcome an obstacle that has vexed counterterrorism efforts in the recent past, i.e., to unify a command authority structure that has historically been divided between Peruvian National Police (PNP) and the uniformed military forces. Problems relating to divided or ambiguous command authority, characterized by PNP and military forces acting without reference to the other's information or orders, have often generated confusion, ineffective operations and sometimes worse. According to sensitive reporting, the killing of five PNP officers and three civilians in a December SL attack was caused in part by a lack of communication and coordination with nearby military forces, which had standing orders that travel in such high risk areas be done in protected convoys.

16. (S) The plan is closely monitored by Minister of Defense Wagner, Minister of Interior Mazetti and Chairman of Joint Chiefs equivalent Montoya. President Garcia, who wishes to correct a legacy of mistakes in the security area made during his first term (85-90) when the SL flourished, has reportedly "blessed" the plan. The Ministry of Defense has taken the lead in coordinating the VRAE, Putumayo and the northern coast plans, while civilian intelligence agencies in the Ministry of Interior have led in developing the Huallaga

Valley plan.

¶7. (S) There are early indications that stage one of the plan has funding levels -- reportedly of approximately USD 20 million -- reflecting that political will and that should facilitate the kick-off of its initial key elements. (Plan VRAE is closest to implementation, and could serve as a kind of test case for the broader effort.) While these funds are insufficient to resolve larger problems of poverty and exclusion that indirectly feed into terrorism and that represent the government's primary political challenge, they should give government forces a genuine capacity to get to work. In this respect, the government appears to be putting its money where its mouth is on counter-terrorism.

Comment:

¶8. (C) In its comprehensive scope and thoroughness, this multi-sectoral and thematically integrated CT plan offers more promise than anything evidenced by the previous government, which spent its first years pretending a terrorism threat no longer existed. Still, in this as in other government plans, the proof will be in its successful implementation and in its results. It is important to note that the only major step proceeding from discussions into action has been the reorganization of command and control.
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